



The Link Between PCOS and Cardiac Risk

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is the most common hormonal (endocrine) syndrome. **It is a metabolic syndrome that affects several body systems and can cause significant long-term health consequences including heart disease.**

Key Features of PCOS Can Increase Heart Disease Risks

So what makes PCOS a threat to our cardiovascular system?

- production of excess androgens (male sex hormones)
- anovulation (the failure to ovulate properly), which makes PCOS the leading cause of anovulatory infertility.
- Emerging research is also identifying the important roles of insulin receptors and chronic inflammation's role in PCOS, which can further the risks for cardiovascular disease.

PCOS Heart Facts

- Research has linked PCOS with multiple risk factors for coronary heart disease including high cholesterol, irregular menstrual cycles, obesity, and hypertension.
- As many as 40% of PCOS patients as young as age 30-45 may have coronary calcification (a warning of heart attack risk).
- Researchers have discovered that the carotid artery, which is located in the neck, is thicker in women with PCOS equaling a higher heart disease risk.
- With PCOS, 50% of patients may develop diabetes or impaired glucose tolerance by age 40, a risk factor for heart disease.
- Patients with PCOS can develop coronary artery disease as early as in their twenties.

Did you Know...

Studies suggest that women with PCOS have **a twice as likely risk of a future cardiovascular event**, like a heart attack or stroke,

“High Insulin Levels from PCOS Can Lead to Heart and Blood Vessel Problems”

...which, you guessed it, contribute to the risk of heart issues. Specifically, higher insulin can present the following issues in your cardiovascular system:

- hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis)
- coronary artery disease and heart attack
- high blood pressure
- high cholesterol
- stroke

Be proactive!

It is important, at minimum, to have a yearly appointment with a PCOS-friendly doctor to have bloodwork checked. Even if you are under 40, PCOS can present heart disease risks. **Women as young as their 20s with PCOS can start developing the plaque deposits leading to cardiovascular disease.** Regular checkups and sound treatment plans are therefore vital to long term health with the syndrome.

PCOS is not a life sentence, even though it is a syndrome you will have throughout your lifetime. **Knowledge is power and together we have the choice (and chance!) to change our lives through education, advocacy, and support.**

To learn more and help prevent PCOS related cardiovascular disease, please join us this February during #HeartHealthMonth as we turn from our traditional teal to red for the 9th Annual #Heart4PCOS Campaign.

References:

AHA Journals: <https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/full/10.1161/01.atv.15.7.821>

NIH Pub MED: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18181081/>

CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/basics/pcos.html>